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When the patient who wasn't started analyzing the doctor who
couldn't, things just naturally got mixed up!

the ID of IRVING

by JACK RITCHIE

WHAT A RACKET, I think. ■ I'm sitting there looking at the green leather couch and substituting for my cousin Irving. ■ But it starts with this real modern judge and he asks Irving how come he got twenty-two tickets in one year for double-parking?

■ So Irving says, "Your Honor, it's a compulsion." ■ The judge looks him over. "A compulsion? I've never heard that one before."

■ I was there in the courtroom watching and I could see Irving sweating. "I'll admit it's pretty rare, Your Honor." ■ "Do you have any glimmering why you nourish this . . . compulsion?" ■ "No, Your Honor. It's like locked up in my head. All kinds of

— turn the page

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IRVING, from page 47
mixed-up emotions."

The judge thinks that over while he's giving Irving the narrow eye. "Everytime you see a row of cars, you just can't resist double-parking?"

Irving uses a handkerchief on his face. "Everything goes sort of blank and the next thing I know I'm double-parked."

The judge is quiet for a whole minute. Just stares. Then he says, "I'm postponing sentencing until the fifteenth of the month. In the meantime I want you to see Dr. Morrison. I'm sure Superior Court can spare him in this case. The Clerk will arrange the appointment."

"Appointment?" Irving says.

"Dr. Morrison is a psychiatrist. Perhaps he can discover the basis for your compulsion. Anyone who double-parks as consistently as you do certainly requires medical treatment."

So either this judge really wants to find out why Irving double-parks, or he knows he's getting a line and is out to give Irving the business. I'm betting that Irving's getting the hammer.

Later we're in a bar and I ask Irving why he has to say he's got that there compulsion.

His shrug is unhappy. "I didn't expect the judge to ask me *why* I double-parked. I just thought I'd plead guilty, pay the fine, and get out. But he threw me a curve and I said the first thing that popped into my head. I just been reading about them compulsions in a magazine at the dentist. Should I tell the judge why I really double-park?"

"I guess not."

The thing is that Irving's a collector for Big Ed the bookie. Irving's got his rounds, he picks up the bet money and takes it back to Big Ed's bookkeepers.

He makes about twenty stops a day and he's not gonna look for a parking spot every time, especially when there ain't one. So he double-parks and figures he'll be back in a minute. But sometimes a cop is waiting and writing out a ticket when he comes back.

I nurse my bourbon. "What was you doing in court in the first place? For something like double-parking, I thought you mail in your fine and that's that."

Irving isn't comfortable. "I been doing that for five years and I get tired of it. So I tear up the tickets this last year and forget about it—except that somebody else don't. They add things up and finally a cop comes to the apartment with a piece of paper and I got to come to court."

Irving drinks a while and then says, "Jerome, why don't you take my place with this head doctor?"

That don't strike me at all.

"Look, Jerome. I'm a bookie type. So I tell the doctor all my secrets?"

"Just keep your mouth shut."

"That sounds good, but it don't work. You start talking about nothing and the next thing you know you begin to spill little things here and there. It's worth fifty bucks to me."

"Keep it. Not interested."

"Be a good relative. If Big Ed finds out I'm talking to a psychiatrist who's maybe a cop, he'll operate on me and I don't like a high voice. A hundred bucks."

"You're crazy. How could we get away with it?"

"I ask around in the courtroom and I find that the judge and the psychiatrist never see each other. The doc just writes out a report and sends it to the judge. You go to the doc and I'll do all the appearing in court. Nobody will ever know. You think this Dr. Morrison's gonna ask you for your driver's license?"

Irving talks up to three hundred bucks before I give in.

This Dr. Morrison's waiting room is small and there's a receptionist, or maybe she's a secretary too. She takes my name and I sit down and read a picture magazine.

Every once in a while I look up.

She's like ash-blond and she sits there, her chin in her hand, and stares at a corner of the ceiling. She's thinking deep and sad about something.

After a while Doc Morrison opens his door, lets out a jerky-type patient, and I'm next.

Morrison is a tall, thin guy and he's wearing shell-rimmed glasses. I notice that when he lets me in he looks back at the girl and she looks at him and he sort of sighs and then closes the door after us.

His office is pretty empty except for a desk, two chairs, and this green leather couch.

He takes the chair behind the desk and I'm heading for the couch, but he points to the other chair.

Then he opens a folder and reads something and I guess it's about Irving.

He looks up after a while like he still don't believe it. "Double-parking?"

"That's right. Maybe you can fix me up."

He sighs, picks up a pencil, and says, "Just relax and tell me what comes to your mind."

There's nothing like the beginning, I figure. "The first thing I can remember is when I'm around two and I'm having a fight with my cousin

Irv... my cousin Jerome."

I tell him all about that and after a half an hour I'm gradually working my way up to when I'm seven. "On my seventh birthday I was pushed out of a window and into a bushel of tomatoes on the sidewalk in front of Herman's Store."

I notice that the doc isn't writing or listening. He's staring out of the window.

So I stop talking and wait.

He keeps looking out there and after a while he says, "Have you ever wished you were a stone?"

It's something to think about. "No, I can't say that I ever did."

He's still staring out there and I get the feeling that he doesn't know I'm in the room. But he talks and according to what he says there's this character Froid who thinks everybody's got a death wish. Like returning to the basics. Stone, it was. We come from stone and we all got the urge to go back because we can just lay there and have no troubles.

I'm willing to go along with all this intelligent stuff for a while, but I begin to fidget. "Doc, what's being mineral got to do with traffic tickets?"

He comes back from wherever he was. He takes off his glasses and polishes them. "Tell me what comes to your mind."

"Why can't I lay on the couch? Like in the movies or TV?"

"The couch is primarily for women patients."

A grin works on my face.

He frowns. "I mean that women are basically dependent. Lying on a couch makes them... give out."

That don't change my grin.

He gets stiff. "Besides that, tell me what comes to your mind."

I remember the bushel of tomatoes and go on from there. "Right about that time I stole a pair of roller skates from a kid down the block."

His eyes are seeing something out the window again, but I go on anyway. Like how stealing the skates always bothered me because I got caught. "My old lady beat the hell out of me."

He's watching an airplane pass by.

"My mother was a saint. A saint."

"Mine too. When she's not yelling or hitting."

"My mother never struck me. Never." He rubs his neck. "She simply talked to me."

"I heard about them things. She probably scared you silly."

He nods and now he's watching a bird.

"My old lady always clobbered me when I had a fight," I say. "Two clobbers if I lost."

— turn to page 50

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IRVING, from page 49

"I never fought."

"Come to think of it, my old lady was always clobbering me for something. I was her favorite. Three sisters and four brothers. I was raising hell all the time."

"I was an only child. I was very well-behaved. I never raised... created disturbances."

"Then what the hell was your old lady always talking to you for?"

"My old lady... my mother... was simply impressing upon me the necessity to be good. To behave. To be decent... and clean."

"You never done *nothing*?"

His eyes are cloudy. "Once she went through my wallet... she was always going through my wallet... and she found those pic..." He stops and blushes. "Did your mother ever go through your wallet?"

"No. I never had no wallet until I

again and he sees me. He frowns and I guess he's wondering if he said something to me. He takes off the glasses again and polishes. "Tell me what comes to your mind."

"Well, when I was about seven and a half, I broke my arm. I fell off the fence behind Joe's Garage. I remember it was about ten in the morning. It was a nice warm day... maybe a few clouds in the sky and..."

He looks at his watch. "Our time is up for today, Mr. Gordon. I'll see you again tomorrow at this same time."

When I leave, I look at this girl again. She's still staring at a corner of the ceiling.

I meet Irving at Mike's Bar.

"How's it going with the doc?" he asks.

"I think the doc's got troubles."

"What like? The window of his

He opens the folder again and seems to remember me. "Oh, yes. A compulsion to double-park." He takes off his glasses and polishes them. "Do you know what a compulsion is?"

Come to think of it, I don't

"There are compulsions and ceremonies," he says. "Essentially they are both of a similar nature and all based on fears... a feeling of inad..." He stops, breathes on the glasses again, and uses the handkerchief. "For instance, some people might believe that they have to touch their mail boy three times every morning before they go to work, or something dreadful might happen. They are, in a sense, warding off evil spirits. Others may continually knock on wood. Or perhaps..."

"I get it, doc," I say. "Like you always keep taking off your glasses and polishing. To ward off the evil spirits."

He stares at me pretty cold and then slips on his glasses. "Tell me what comes to your mind."

"Anything?"

"Of course. Anything."

"Well, I was thinking about that girl of yours out there. Looks to me like she's mooning about something she isn't getting. Why don't you two get together and use that couch for..."

His face breaks into white and red splotches and he jumps up. He points to the door. "Get Out!"

Naturally I blink. "Now hold it, doc. You said, 'Anything.' And besides, I heard that psychiatrists ain't supposed to get mad at their patients."

He stands there a little while longer, his finger quivering in the direction of the door. Then his eyes go to the diplomas on the wall and he pulls himself together and sits down. He reaches for his glasses, but changes his mind. He folds his hands. "Tell me what comes to your mind. But we will confine our talk to *you*."

So I'll settle for that. I remember where I left off yesterday. "I was walking this fence behind Joe's Garage. It was about ten in the morning... a nice warm day..."

Fifteen minutes later I'm telling how the doctor put the cast on my arm.

Doc Morrison yawns with his mouth shut—you can tell he's got class—and he says, "When did you first discover sex?"

I'm talking about a broken arm and that reminds him of sex?

He studies me like he was measuring me for a suit. "What was the most important event you remember when you were about... when you were about fourteen, I imagine."

— turn to page 52



was sixteen."

"I was fourteen. And she found those pictures, and she talked to me for two hours." He was sweating a little. "I'll never forget."

"My old lady used to say that if any of her boys wasn't interested in girls by the time he was twelve, there was something wrong with him."

"Did you carry pictures?"

"No. But I looked at them like anybody else who's normal."

The doc talks like he's trying to convince himself. "Of course it's normal. Absolutely normal."

"Sure. If you don't carry it too far. Like Wet Fingers Benarki. He used to have so many he carried them around in a cigar box."

"Just three pictures," the doc says real bitter. "I never carried any before and I've never carried any since. Not after those two hours."

His mind comes back into the room

Packard dirty?"

"There's three things worries a man," I say. "Health, money, and women. He looks healthy, so I guess it's a woman."

Irving pays for the shots. "What you been talking about with the doc?"

"Just stuff. That reminds me, Irving, you pushed me out of a window right into them tomatoes when I was seven. I never paid you back for that."

He looks at me. "So you're an elephant with the mind? Then remember you stole my roller skates two weeks later."

It's a Tuesday. I spend the night with Mollie.

On Wednesday I'm at the doc's again and this girl is still staring at the ceiling. Maybe she didn't even go home. She looks like she lost a couple of pounds.

Doc Morrison looks miserable too.

Adam

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IRVING, from page 50

The most important event when I was fourteen? I suddenly remember and begin to sweat. "I don't want to talk about it."

He leans forward. "But you must. Confession is therapy—of a sort."

I think he's just curious. But I decide, what the hell. "It happened on a baseball field."

He wraps his mind around that for a few seconds. "Not exactly a private place. It was night time, I presume?"

"No. Daylight. The score was 3 to 2, last of the ninth. Two outs and a man on third and I'm at bat. All I need is a lousy single. It's the regional championship."

He reaches for his glasses and changes his mind again. "I mean, when did you discover sex? When did you have your first... ah... experience?"

I think back. "I was about eleven. It was a Halloween party in the Kaminski kid's garage. Liz Perkins, I think. Or maybe Betty Schultz. I don't remember exactly. It was pretty dark."

"Eleven?" he says and then nods. "Yes, primitives have... early experiences." He studies his knuckles. "Did your mother tell you about sex?"

"Naw. My Aunt Mabel. She used to work in a house."

"A house?"

"Fat Tessie's. Not much of a joint, but it was a working class neighborhood. Aunt Mabel could floor you with a bag of quarters. The things she told me kept me off women until I was eleven." I remember Liz. Or was it Betty? "There's a big difference between knowing something and doing it for the first time."

He nods and stares out of the window. "Theory and practice."

"Yeah. Like you read and study all about being an architect, maybe. But that ain't enough."

"It ain't? Isn't?"

"No. You got to go out and erect a building."

He winces.

A word I just said bothered him. "Building?" I ask.

He shakes his head. "That's not the one."

He's watching a guy washing windows on a building across the street and after a while he sort of mumbles. "She always said it was dirty. My mother. But I know it's clean. Wholesome. Healthy." He shakes his head. "A miserable stew."

Stew? "Well, nobody likes it dirty," I say. "Unless he's real hungry or some kind of a nut. Clean, wholesome, and healthy sounds all right, but like bland. It ought to be spiced up a little."

"Spiced up?"

"Sure. Make it more interesting."

He looks like he hopes the window washer will fall. "But I can't. She's a saint."

"Your mother?"

"No. Irene."

Everybody's a saint to this guy. "Look," I say. "In order to be a saint, you got to be dead. Father O'Brien told me that. Is this here Irene dead?"

"No. Alive. Very much alive." The doc comes out of his cloud and sees me again. "Tell me what comes to your mind."

I suppose I should tell him about the game. But it's touchy. Makes me hot and bothered just to think of it. So I walk around it. "When I was eight, I got a part in the Christmas play at school. I was one of the brownies."

He looks at his watch and the session is over.

He follows me to the door and tells the girl, "Irene, make another appointment for Mr. Gordon tomorrow. The same time."

It's a Wednesday and that night I almost want to tell Carrie about that game, only I know she don't care much about baseball. So we finish our beer and turn out a couple of lights.

When I show up at the doc's on Wednesday, the ash blonde looks sicker, and when I step into the office, I see that the doc looks like he could use a good cry and is thinking about it.

Also I notice something else. Drifting toward me is the smell of bourbon.

The doc looks at me and remembers. "Oh, yesh... yes. Double-parking. Tell me what comes to your mind."

All night—when Carrie wasn't bothering me—I been thinking about that baseball game. But I still can't talk about it.

He leans forward, blinks a couple of times and says, "Did you ever have trouble... performing?"

The last thing I was telling him yesterday was how I was a Brownie in the Christmas play. "No," I say. "I got a talent for it. Sort of comes naturally."

He rests his chin on his hands. "Never had any trouble at all?"

"Naw."

"Ever since you were eleven?"

I was eight when I was a Brownie. But I guess it don't make no difference. I nod.

He gets up then and begins walking around the room. "I should have started earlier," he mutters. "But no, I had to wait until now. Save yourself, she said. And on top of that it's got to be good, clean, and whole-

some."

I remember that my old lady and Aunt Mabel seen the Christmas play. "There was probably a hundred people watching," I say.

He stops in his tracks and stares at me. Then he rubs his forehead. "Oh, yes. It was a Halloween party." He goes to the couch and sits down on it. "I must say you have remarkable stage presence."

The bourbon's got the doc a little confused. It was Christmas, not Halloween. But I don't correct him.

We're quiet for a while and my mind drifts back to the ball game. It wouldn't have been so bad, except that it was the big game. One measly scratch hit and the team would of gone to Des Moines for the finals. Finally I can't stand it any longer. "I struck out!"

He's been sitting on that green couch with his eyes closed and now he opens them. "Struck out? Oh, yes. I suppose you could use that term. How many times?"

Up to the ninth inning, I had two singles, a double, and I walked once. I was up for the fifth time. "Just once," I say.

He seems disappointed. He closes his eyes again and lays down on the couch. "Using your parlance, I've never even gotten a hit."

I look him over. He don't look like much of an athlete. Not enough heft. But still you can get good if you begin the game young. "When did you start playing?"

"Just recently. Very, very recently."

I get it. Like an office team. A bunch of interns, or something like that. I think back to the game where I struck out. "It wouldn't of been so bad except for all those people watching and counting on me."

The eyes open. "Do you *always* have an audience?"

"No. Sometimes it's just on a sandlot."

The eyes close again.

I can see this doc is awful worried about the baseball game that's coming up. "Doc," I say. "The main thing is that you got to have confidence."

He's breathing slow and he mumbles. "Confidence."

"That's right. Confidence."

"Confidence," he mumbles again. "Confidence."

I could swear he's asleep, except that he's talking.

"It ain't what you got, doc," I say. "It's how you use it."

He comes back like an echo. "How you use it."

"Rev up that old confidence. Even if a thousand people are watching."

He stirs a little. "I'd rather not

have anybody watching. Even my mother. She's a saint."

Well, I don't guess a game between interns and doctors is much of a draw anyway. "So nobody will be there."

"Thank you."

I remember that when I was up at the plate, I always used to make believe I was somebody else. Like Dimaggio or maybe Williams. That put the extra snap in the wrists. "Pick yourself a hero," I say, "and pretend that you're him."

He's thinking or sleeping, and then he says, "I pick you."

I blush. "Well, I'll admit I was the best in the neighborhood."

"In the whole world," he says. "The whole world."

Come to think of it, I always thought I could of made the big league if I'd just kept at it. So if thinking of me helps him at the plate, I'll leave it that way. "All right, doc," I say. "Pretend you're me. When you get up there, think of me."

"Think of you," he says, and I almost have to read his lips. "Pretend I'm you. When I get up there."

And then he gets a smile on his face and starts to snore.

I think of waking him up—we still got fifteen minutes more—but what the hell, he looks like this is the first good sleep in a week.

That night I want to tell Maggie about the time I struck out, but she falls asleep at midnight.

When I show up at the doc's the next day, there's this Irene all bright-eyed and smiling and the doc has a grin that almost meets at the back of his neck. The birds and singing, I guess, but I don't know why.

When he closes the door behind us he pounds me on the back and hands me a cigar. "I've been thinking about you," he says. "All night. All hits. No errors."

So it was a night game?

"Irving," he says, and that's the first time he uses what he thinks is my first name, "about this double-parking. I'll fix you up a report that Menninger would be proud of."

And so when Irving appears in court, the judge looks at him and then at the open folder in front of him on the bench like he can't believe either one of them. Then he dismisses the case.

Later, when Irving and me are in a bar, Irving says, "Jerome, about this psychotic analysis type thing. Did you ever get around to sex?"

All I can remember is baseball. "No," I say.

Irving sighs and shakes his head. "A quack."

It's a Friday. I spend the night with Nelly. ☼

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